

# Mexico

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## Freedom of the Press

[Mexico \(en español\)](#)

Mexico continued to be one of the world's most dangerous and complicated places to practice journalism in 2013. According to the international media watchdog group Article 19, 76 journalists were killed between 2000 and 2013, and another 16 have disappeared since 2003. Observers praised the promulgation of statutes empowering a special prosecutor for crimes against public expression, but there was little immediate impact on the near-total impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of such attacks. In addition, the year-old federal protection program for journalists was deemed unreliable by analysts and participants. Multiple attacks on reporters, media offices, and websites were carried out during the year, photographers faced police aggression while covering protests, state-level criminal defamation charges chilled criticism, and self-censorship remained widespread. In a more encouraging development, a potentially transformative new law empowered a federal regulator to increase competition in the telecommunications and broadcast television sectors.

Freedom of expression is established in Articles 6 and 7 of the constitution. Mexico decriminalized defamation at the federal level in 2007, and a number of states have eliminated their own criminal defamation statutes, including, in 2012, the state of Mexico—the country's most populous. Nevertheless, criminal defamation laws remain on the books in 12 of the 32 states, and both criminal and civil codes continue to be used to intimidate journalists. In Tlaxcala, just east of Mexico City, editor Martín Ruiz Rodríguez of the online newspaper *e-consulta* was arrested in April on criminal defamation charges lodged by the state government's interior secretary. Four other journalists at *e-consulta* also faced defamation charges filed by officials close to Governor Mariano González Zarur.

Mexico passed a Freedom of Information Law in 2002, and a 2007 amendment to Article 6 of the constitution stated that all levels of government would be required to make their information public. However, information can be temporarily withheld if it is in the public interest to do so, and accessing information is often a time-consuming and difficult process in practice.

While the number of grave crimes against journalists, such as murders and disappearances, declined in 2013, the overall level of attacks and threats grew. Article 19 reported that by September it had registered 225 incidents of aggression against journalists, media workers, and media installations, surpassing the 207 attacks in all of 2012 and the 172 in 2011. Part of the increase stemmed from police attempts to repress coverage of street protests throughout the country. During protests on the anniversary of a 1968 student massacre in Mexico City in October, Article 19's observer network documented 46 attacks on the press, a majority of which were direct assaults by police who ignored reporters' clearly displayed media credentials. The attacks included one beating so severe that Article 19 labeled it an attempted murder. This followed other incidents in the capital, including several attacks on the press during protests surrounding President Enrique Peña Nieto's inauguration in December 2012 and further violence in September, when four photographers were arrested and one beaten while covering demonstrations against Peña Nieto's state-of-the-nation address. Suppression of coverage also occurred during teachers' protests in Veracruz in September, although state authorities denied that police had engaged in any

violence against the press while dispersing the assemblies.

Despite the drop in murders and disappearances in 2013, Mexico remains among the most dangerous environments in the world for journalists due to the turf battles between Mexican drug cartels, the government's decision to fight the crime groups with the armed forces, and the weaknesses of Mexico's public security institutions. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, three journalists were killed and one disappeared under suspicious circumstances in 2013, although work-related motives had not been confirmed by year's end. Article 19 reported a fourth murder during the year; the general lawlessness in many areas of the country makes it difficult to determine whether journalists were targeted for their work. In an alarming new development, threats against freedom of expression were extended to international monitoring groups in 2013. Article 19 reported that its Mexico director, Darío Ramírez, had received a death threat in April, and that its installations in Mexico City were under surveillance in October. The organization received protection from the federal government.

The offices of a number of media outlets across Mexico were attacked during the year. In November a group of masked men assaulted employees and journalists at a radio station in Quintana Roo that is owned by a former mayor of Felipe Carrillo Puerto. Explosive devices were detonated in April outside the premises of the newspaper *Mural* in Guadalajara, a member of the Grupo Reforma newspaper conglomerate. The attack was the seventh on a Grupo Reforma media outlet since 2010, making it, along with the television channel Televisa, the most frequently victimized media company in that period. Five journalists from the Coahuila newspaper *El Siglo de Torreón* were briefly kidnapped and threatened in February, and the paper's offices were attacked three times that month.

The prevalence of threats, and impunity for perpetrators, caused self-censorship to deepen and spread, including to areas that have not been considered hotspots in the drug war, such as Zacatecas and municipalities surrounding Mexico City. In a high-profile case, the newspaper *Zócalo* in Saltillo, the capital of Coahuila state, published an editorial saying it would no longer carry reports on organized crime after its publisher, Francisco Juaristi, was threatened in banners placed around the city. *Zócalo* joins *El Diario de Juárez* and *El Mañana* of Nuevo Laredo, which had both published similar announcements after attacks on their staff and installations in previous years. The Observatory of Public Communication Processes about Violence, a group of outlets jointly monitoring coverage of violence and drug trafficking, reported that national coverage of those topics declined following Peña Nieto's inauguration, as the federal government implemented strategies to reduce the prominence of violence in the news.

Officials sometimes dismissed potential journalism-related motives for attacks and threats with questionable speed. Without providing any basis for their claims, Coahuila state authorities quickly declared that the April murder of *Vanguardia* newspaper photographer Daniel Alejandro Martínez Bazaldúa was unrelated to his reporting. Officials in Tamaulipas provided contradictory information about whether journalist Mario Ricardo Chávez Jorge was dead, even after his girlfriend identified his dismembered body in June. The murders of Jaime Guadalupe González Domínguez, editor and reporter for the website *Ojinaga Noticias* in Chihuahua, and police reporter Alberto López Bello of *El Imparcial* in Oaxaca likewise remained unsolved. Sergio Landa Rosado, a crime reporter for *Diario Cardel* in the state of Veracruz, has been missing since January.

Impunity for attacks on the press can be attributed in large part to a combination of state and local authorities' ineptitude and their involvement with or fear of organized crime groups. Federal authorities are not fully trusted by journalists either, though federal prosecutors can claim more professionalism and distance from the corruption and threats that impede subnational officials. Statutes that took effect in May implemented a 2012 constitutional reform empowering the Office of the Federal Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Free Expression. Prior to the implementing regulations, the office had lacked the authority to assert jurisdiction over cases and had achieved just one conviction in six years. Despite the changes,

Special Prosecutor Laura Borbolla was initially hesitant to claim jurisdiction without state officials' approval. By August her office had taken on only one homicide case, the 2008 murder of *El Diario de Juárez* police reporter Armando Rodríguez Carreón.

According to Human Rights Watch, another federal program, the Protection Mechanism for Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, was “seriously undermined by a lack of funds and political support at all levels of government.” Journalists and human rights defenders who sought risk assessment and protection measures faced long delays and inadequate safeguards. Some journalists do benefit from the program, such as Emilio Lugo, editor of the *Agoraguerrero* news website, who was relocated from Guerrero after his investigations and criticisms of state authorities resulted in threats. Although there is no confirmed count of Mexican journalists in exile, tenuous security conditions have prompted several to leave the country. Verónica Basurto, an investigative television reporter in Mexico City, criticized the federal protection process as inadequate and fled to Europe after receiving multiple threats. Miguel Ángel López, whose journalist father and brother were murdered in Veracruz in 2011, received asylum in the United States in June.

In August, reporters and press advocates pursuing justice in the 2012 death of *Proceso* magazine reporter Regina Martínez in Veracruz achieved a victory of sorts when the Veracruz Supreme Court vacated the conviction of a man who claimed he had falsely confessed to killing Martínez during a robbery after police beat and tortured him. In April, *Proceso* accused former and current state officials of plotting to kill Jorge Carrasco, a correspondent for the magazine who unearthed numerous inconsistencies in the investigation; Carrasco temporarily went into exile in Europe following a series of threats. Separately, press organizations expressed outrage when a judge dismissed charges, without offering justification, against one of the gunmen implicated in a 1997 assassination attempt on *Zeta* magazine editor J. Jesús Blancornelas.

Community radio stations in Mexico face another type of threat, as local coverage may draw the ire of local politicians or business owners more than organized crime figures. There have been reports of numerous arrests, detentions, and threats by local authorities and international companies in Oaxaca against radio personalities who oppose the licensing process for and proposed construction of a huge wind farm.

Numerous privately owned newspapers operate in Mexico, and diversity is fairly broad in the urban print media. However, the broadcasting sector is highly concentrated, especially in television, with two networks—Televisa and TV Azteca—controlling 85 percent of the stations. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) maintained a cozy arrangement with both networks throughout its decades in power. Although Mexican media pluralism increased during the 12 years (2000–12) that the PRI was out of power, accusations that Televisa was colluding with then candidate Peña Nieto of the PRI spurred the rise of a student movement during the 2012 election campaign and sharpened pressure for postelection reform. Analysts praised reforms that were signed into law in June 2013 creating a new Federal Telecommunications Institute (Ifetel) that has the power to declare a company “dominant” in its industry if its market share exceeds 50 percent. Ifetel can then order companies to take steps that enhance competition, including lowering interconnection costs and carrying competitors' television programming on cable and satellite systems. The law also created a specialized court to hear telecommunications disputes, and limits the use of *amparos*, a form of readily obtained injunction that can clog judicial processes.

The new rules are expected to pose an unprecedented challenge to the power of Televisa, which controls about 70 percent of the free-to-air television market and is the largest cable and satellite television operator, as well as billionaire Carlos Slim's América Móvil, which holds a similarly dominant position in the telephone market. In addition to the antitrust provisions, the reform will create two new free-to-air television networks, enhancing competition and broadening viewing options throughout the country. However, the effects of the promising new framework had yet to be seen. In the meantime, high costs and lack of

investment have limited access to telecommunications services. According to the International Telecommunications Union, only 43 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2013, but 75 percent of households had a mobile telephone and 95 percent had a television set as of 2012.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Not Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

61

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

16

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

31

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

14